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How to Become a Destination Workplace

People will want to work for you when you create the right corporate culture.

December 13, 2004

By Paul J. Sarvadi URL: <http://www.Entrepreneur.com/article/0,4621,319080,00.html>

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Every business should strive to create a positive corporate culture. But developing a culture that attracts, retains and motivates quality employees doesn't just happen by accident—it requires a plan. You can start by asking yourself what kind of workplace you want. To help you define your desired workplace and shape your corporate culture, focus on these four points:

1. Mission: Your mission answers the question, "What are we here for?" Your response should include your primary product or service, your target market and key elements of your service model (such as the importance of creativity, technology, a team approach and so on). Every business should have an up-to-date, well-structured mission statement that's understood and embraced by its employees. I also recommend that you communicate your mission statement in appropriate ways to your clients, customers, prospects, potential employees and other interested parties. Doing so sends an important "who, what, when, where and how" message about your enterprise to those most important to your business, beginning with your employees.

2. Values: Values convey what's really important to you. We heard a lot about values during the last election, and it should come as no surprise that values are important to people in all areas of life, including business. Three commonly shared values that resonate with most people are: honesty, integrity and treating others with respect. Take some time to identify and define the values that are important to you and your company. They are key statements in their own right and are essential in formulating your beliefs and standards.

3. Beliefs: Beliefs are a natural extension of our values and help answer the question, "How do we make decisions?" For example, one of our foundational beliefs at Administaff, the Houston-based professional employer organization where I am chairman and CEO, is that our greatest asset is our people. This belief has its roots in our value of respect for the worth of each person. In fact, we believe that a company *is* its people. This principle guides our recruiting strategy and helps us attract and retain quality workers that are hired for their input more than their output.

Another foundational belief is that of maintaining a proper work-life balance. We don't live to work, but rather work to live. While there will be occasions when we all have to put in some extra hours, those instances really should be occasional and not typical. Accordingly, we make decisions to provide employees with the tools, training and support they need to accomplish their tasks in a normal workday. These beliefs are even factored into our decisions about organizational structure, so that our growth doesn't overburden our employees and disrupt their work-life balance. We've also learned that becoming a better person at work can help you become a better person at home.

4. Standards: Standards provide clear statements about how people are expected to behave, interact, resolve conflicts and relate to each other. Standards are essential to any successful undertaking, whether you're an organization of one or 1,000. If you don't follow commonly accepted guidelines of respectful behavior and productivity, you'll never get anything done and you'll alienate most of your support team in the process. We all do better when we know what is expected of us and how we are to manage interpersonal relations. Conflicts and disagreements are inevitable, but they can be either constructive or destructive, depending on how they're handled. A company handbook like we provide our clients is an essential tool for capturing and conveying company standards. Couple the handbook with periodic training to remind and reinforce your corporate standards and exhibit top-down exemplary behavior

(practice what you preach), and you'll find that your employees will adhere to those standards in their daily work with very positive results.

Developing the corporate culture of a destination workplace happens by design, not default. Too many companies fail to give human resource management the time and attention it deserves. Also, a positive corporate culture is the foundational component of a comprehensive people strategy that will enable you to leverage your human capital into a competitive advantage. Just as you need solid strategies for sales, finance and operations, you need a human resources strategy. Use the elements outlined above to structure your corporate culture strategy, and you will have taken a significant first step toward developing a winning people strategy.

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